

H. Res. 673

In the House of Representatives, U.S.,

March 8, 2006.

Whereas the establishment of a democratic, transparent, and fair election process for the 2006 presidential election in the Republic of Belarus and of a genuinely democratic political system are prerequisites for that country's integration into the Western community of nations;

Whereas the Government of Belarus has accepted numerous specific commitments governing the conduct of elections as a participating State of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), including provisions of the 1990 Copenhagen Document;

Whereas these commitments, which encourage transparency, balance, and impartiality in an election process, have become the standard by which observers determine whether elections have been conducted freely and fairly;

Whereas the election on March 19, 2006, of the next president of Belarus will provide an unambiguous test of the extent of the commitment of the Belarusian authorities to implement these standards and build a democratic society based on free elections and the rule of law;

Whereas previous elections in Belarus have not met international standards;

Whereas the 2004 vote on the constitutional referendum in Belarus did not meet international standards;

Whereas it is the duty of government and public authorities at all levels to act in a manner consistent with all laws and regulations governing election procedures and to ensure free and fair elections throughout the entire country, including preventing activities aimed at undermining the free exercise of political rights;

Whereas a genuinely free and fair election requires a period of political campaigning conducted in an environment in which neither administrative action nor violence, intimidation, or detention hinder the parties, political associations, and the candidates from presenting their views and qualifications to the citizenry, including organizing supporters, conducting public meetings and events throughout the country, and enjoying unimpeded access to television, radio, print, and Internet media on an equal basis;

Whereas a genuinely free and fair election requires that citizens be guaranteed the right and effective opportunity to exercise their civil and political rights, including the right to vote free from intimidation, threats of political retribution, or other forms of coercion by national or local authorities or others;

Whereas a genuinely free and fair election requires the full transparency of laws and regulations governing elections, multiparty representation on election commissions, and unobstructed access by candidates, political parties, and domestic and international observers to all election procedures, including voting and vote-counting in all areas of the country;

Whereas control and manipulation of the media by national and local officials and others acting at their behest could raise grave concerns regarding the commitment of the Belarusian authorities to free and fair elections;

Whereas efforts by national and local officials and others acting at their behest to impose obstacles to free assembly, free speech, and a free and fair political campaign will call into question the fairness of the upcoming election in Belarus; and

Whereas the arrest or intimidation of opposition political parties and candidates, such as the leader of the Unified Democratic Forces and other people involved with the opposition, represents a deliberate assault on the democratic process: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the House of Representatives—

(1) looks forward to the development of cordial relations between the United States and the Republic of Belarus;

(2) emphasizes that a precondition for the integration of Belarus into the Western community of nations is its establishment of a genuinely democratic political system;

(3) expresses its strong and continuing support for the efforts of the Belarusian people to establish a full democracy, the rule of law, and respect for human rights in Belarus;

(4) urges the Government of Belarus to guarantee freedom of association and assembly, including the right

of candidates, members of political parties, and others to freely assemble, to organize and conduct public events, and to exercise these and other rights free from intimidation or harassment by national or local officials or others acting at their behest;

(5) urges the Government of Belarus to meet its Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) standards and commitments on democratic elections, including the standards on free and fair elections as defined in the 1990 Copenhagen Document;

(6) urges the Belarusian authorities to ensure—

(A) the full transparency of election procedures before, during, and after the 2006 presidential election;

(B) unobstructed access by election monitors from the Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), other participating States of the OSCE, Belarusian political parties, candidates' representatives, nongovernmental organizations, and other private institutions and organizations—both foreign and domestic—to all aspects of the election process, including unimpeded access to public campaign events, candidates, news media, voting, and post-election tabulation of results and processing of election challenges and complaints;

(C) multiparty representation on all election commissions;

(D) unimpeded access by all parties and candidates to print, radio, television, and Internet media on a non-discriminatory basis;

(E) freedom of candidates, members of opposition parties, and independent media organizations from intimidation or harassment by government officials at all levels via selective tax audits and other regulatory and bureaucratic procedures, and in the case of media, license revocations and libel suits, among other measures;

(F) a transparent process for complaint and appeals through electoral commissions and within the court system that provides timely and effective remedies; and

(G) vigorous prosecution of any individual or organization responsible for violations of election laws or regulations, including the application of appropriate administrative or criminal penalties;

(7) encourages the international community, including the Council of Europe, the OSCE, and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, to continue their efforts to support democracy in Belarus and urges countries such as Lithuania and other Baltic countries and Nordic coun-

tries to continue to provide assistance to nongovernmental organizations and other Belarusian organizations involved in promoting democracy and fair elections in Belarus; and

(8) pledges its support to the Belarusian people, their commitment to a fully free and open democratic system, their creation of a prosperous free market economy, and their country's assumption of its rightful place as a full and equal member of the Western community of democracies.

Attest:

Clerk.